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### III.—ON A LEGEND OF THE ALBAN LAKE TOLD BY DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASSUS.

The methods used by the ancient writers in dealing with the early history of the Roman Commonwealth are now too well understood to require any comment in detail. The final result of their labors as seen on the pages of Livy and Dionysius, however interesting it may be to the student of folklore, national character or literature, brings small comfort to the admirer of history as a truthful record of events. The early Roman annalist found himself in a position peculiarly difficult. His own lack of training in the investigation of materials for history was only equalled by the poverty in such materials. Furthermore, while the legends of Rome distinctly connected her with the old mother-city of Alba Longa, while the story of Romulus and Remus was a national inheritance, it was perfectly evident that the tale of Aeneas was a stranger. But the tale of Aeneas could not be set aside by the patriotic historian, for at the close of the second Punic war it assumed, as Nissen has observed,<sup>1</sup> a distinctly political importance. Hence the early annalists were confronted with the problem of so adapting it as to agree with and form a part of the native legends, which were too well known to be ignored. The task was difficult and constantly grew more so as the years went on and investigation developed in scope and accuracy. One of the most vexatious arose when chronology began to assert its claims. It was then discovered that between the fall of Troy and the foundation of Rome was a gap of over three hundred years. To bridge the chasm was devised the list of Alban kings from Ascanius to Amulius, in its finally accepted form the latest and most evident forgery in the whole story. The investigators who first discovered this formidable hiatus perhaps contented themselves with the statement that there had been a royal house at Alba through which the blood of Aeneas was transmitted to the founders of

<sup>1</sup> Jahn's Jahrb. 91, p. 384; Schwegler, Röm. Gesch. I, p. 305 ff.

Rome. It is a significant fact that the list of Alban kings, fully equipped with names and dates—and not much else—does not emerge until the fortunes of the Roman State were bound up with the personal interests of a family which claimed descent from Anchises and Venus. Mommsen<sup>1</sup> is undoubtedly correct in his conjecture that the person most responsible was Alexander Polyhistor; his literary habits are plainly reflected in the list of Alban kings as we now find it in the surviving writers.

The general consensus of critics that this list is a pure invention and probably originated in Greek literature rests on a number of proofs of which the integrity can scarcely be questioned. The names themselves are, most of them, palpably strangers to their surroundings, and "sehr wohlfeil zusammengebettelt," as Schwegler says (*Röm. Gesch.* I, p. 343, n. 2). A great deal of variation in the different lists is to be observed, the number 330 has a suspiciously ritualistic appearance, the unusual exactness in dates is coupled with a noticeable reticence of historical details. Historical details are, in fact, limited to brief notices attached to the names of three kings. Tiberinus was drowned in the river Albula, after which it was called the Tiber. Aventinus was buried on the Mons Aventinus: hence its name. Both of these stories are, of course, aetiological and may be summarily dismissed. The third king, variously named, was an impious tyrant. He imitated thunder and lightning; therefore the god slew him with a real thunderbolt. It is this story which I wish to examine in detail, taking as a basis the narrative of Dionysius, who in prose is the chief exponent of the Aeneas legend. His account (*Antiq. Rom.* I 71, 3 ff.) is as follows: "And after Agrippa came Allodius, who reigned nineteen years, a monster of tyranny whom the gods hated: for, scorning the divine powers, he fashioned imitations of lightning and loud noises resembling claps of thunder, with which he thought to terrify men, as if he were a god. But tempests and thunderbolts rushed down upon his dwelling and, the lake having risen to an unwonted height, he and all his house were overwhelmed and destroyed. And to this day, if the lake is clear in a certain quarter, whenever the flow of

<sup>1</sup> *Röm. Chron.*, p. 156. Polyhistor was afterwards abetted by Castor. There was also a considerable mass of tradition in the time of the Caesars originating in certain private families, not to mention other matters suggested by grammatical and antiquarian research. Fragments are still visible in the Servian Commentary to Vergil. See Caer, *Röm. Aeneassage*, p. 144 ff.

water from the source subsides and the depths are undisturbed,<sup>1</sup> the ruins of porticoes and other traces of a dwelling are still visible."

The fragment of Diodorus Siculus (Book 7, Frag. 5) which relates this story was preserved in the Armenian version of the Chronicle of Eusebius. The narrative is the same, except that the king is named *Arramulius* Silvius and that his method of imitating thunder is described: "Sometimes, when at harvest time the rolling of thunder was loud and continuous, he would order his troops, at the word of command, to beat their weapons in unison upon their shields, thinking that the sound so produced could surpass the very thunder itself." It is interesting to compare this version with the abbreviated form of the same passage found in the *Excerpta de Virtutibus et Vitiis*.<sup>2</sup> The excerptor calls the king *Romulus* Silvius, but tells briefly the same story until the king imitates thunder. He then closes with a curt *διὸ κεραυνωθῆναι*. The omission of all which follows in his original is characteristic of the moralizer as opposed to the story-teller, and illustrates the readiness with which a legend is altered or modified to suit the purposes of the narrator.

Zonaras (7, 1, D.) calls the king *Amulius*, the son of Tiberinus. "He dared to assume the attributes of a god and was so vain-glorious as to artificially rival thunder with thunder, to rival lightning with lightning and to hurl thunderbolts. Wherefore he perished utterly, for the lake by which he dwelt rose suddenly and destroyed both him and his palace."

The *Origo Gentis Romanae* (18, 2) calls the king *Aremulus* Silvius, follows the account of Diodorus in the description of his sin, and then says that "he was struck by lightning, swept away by a whirlwind and cast into the Alban lake, as we are told in book VI of the Annals and the Epitome of Piso, II. Aufidius, however, in his Epitomae, and Domitius, book I, say that he was not struck by lightning, but that it was an earthquake which cast

<sup>1</sup> ὅταν ὑπονοστήσῃ τὸ νᾶμα καὶ σταθερὸς ὁ βυθὸς γένηται. Usually translated "when the lake is low, recedes from its usual height," etc., as though νᾶμα here were used simply as a variant of the more usual λίμνη, which occurs in the same sentence. But the Alban lake is entirely fed from the bottom by gushing springs. From this point of view νᾶμα in its usual sense becomes perfectly intelligible and the term σταθερός is eminently proper, as every hill-dweller who is familiar with such pools would be aware. Hence Cobet's emendation (Obs., p. 134) to φανερός is quite unnecessary.

<sup>2</sup> See Diodorus, Book 7, Frag. 7.

him and his palace together into the Alban lake." Jordan (Hermes, 3, 421 ff.) shows that this work is a forgery of the fifth or sixth century and that the author got most of his materials from the Vergilian commentators. The alternative here proposed of an earthquake is perhaps too summarily dismissed by Jordan, but, of course, the parade of references is not to be taken seriously. This is merely Ancient Learning in her second childhood.

Livy, with more than usual caution, has reduced the story to the lowest terms compatible with existence, contenting himself with the bare statement "fulmine ictus." His name for the king is *Romulus Silvius*.

Ovid tells the story twice, each time with a different authority before him. In the *Metamorphoses* (14, 616 ff.) he says that Tiberinus had two sons, *Remulus* and Acrota. "Remulus the elder perished by the lightning—he had imitated it. Acrota, who was more temperate than his brother, left the sceptre to Aventinus." In the *Fasti* (4, 49) he tells of Tiberinus, of his son Agrippa, and of *Remulus*, his grandson. "They say," he adds, "that thunderbolts were cast at Remulus. After these came Aventinus," etc. These passages are one of the many proofs which show how uncertain and conflicting were the various lists of Alban kings. To be sure, Ovid wrote poetry, not dissertations, but it would be dangerous to adopt Caerer's suggestion (*Röm. Aeneassage*, p. 149) that metre in this case had anything to do with even a change of names. Metre never prevented Ovid from telling a story as he desired. Taking into consideration Ovid's surpassing ability as a story-teller, the omission of any reference to the rising of the lake, etc.—from the poet's point of view certainly the most telling portion of the story—would lead us to believe that there was no mention of it in either of the authorities which he consulted.

All we learn from the version of Dion Cassius is the name *Amulius*, registered by Tzetzes (*Scholia ad Lycoph.* 1250). Appian is only quoted by Photius, and is represented by the statement that *Romulus* was struck by lightning.

The Chronicle of Hieronymus and the probably mutilated account of Syncellus (p. 148) agree in calling the king *Aremulus Silvius*, and in saying that he reigned 19 years and was blasted for impiety. Cassiodorus calls him *Aremulus* and the "Χρονογραφείον Σύντομον," Ἐρεμούλιος. The *Excerpta Latini Barbari* says: "*Tar-cyinius Silvius* regnavit annos XVIII," a statement chiefly valuable

as showing how readily these people identify one tyrant with another better known.<sup>1</sup>

How much and in what way the narrators of these different versions depend upon each other or their predecessors is a matter not pertinent to the present enquiry. For this, reference is made to Mommsen, *Röm. Chron.*, p. 150 ff., and especially to Fr. Cauer, 'Die röm. Aeneassage von Naevius bis Vergilius,' 15. Supplementband der *Jahrb. f. class. Philologie*.

When we compare the different statements of the legend, we notice, among other things, the variation in the name of the king. There is really less variation, however, than would appear at first sight. *Romulus*, *Remulus* and *Aremulus* are practically identical.<sup>2</sup> *Amulius* (like *Tarcyinius* of the *Excerpt. Lat. Bar.*) was doubtless suggested by another tyrant better known. *Arramulius* (Euseb., *Armen. Vers.*) and *Ἐρεμούλιος* (*Χρον. Συγγ.*) are probably the result either of bad text or a combination of the names *Amulius* and *Remulus*. The identity of *Allodius* (occurring only in *Dionysius*) and *Amulius* has lately been pointed out by Trieber, 'Die Königstafel von Alba Longa,' *Hermes*, 29, 130. It would be time lost to seek for any name in these variants better than the rest, since none of them appear to have had any historical foundation.

Comparison of versions also shows that the different narrators felt that the important point in this story was the fact that the king, whatever his name was, was struck by lightning. It is the one thing which they have in common.<sup>3</sup> Livy, indeed, has nothing else. Others, again, add the reason why he was blasted. He was impious. He defied the gods. One need not confine himself to the classics for parallels to this part of the story. In all countries and times the signal retribution of blasphemy or impiety has always been thought to be the thunderbolt. The writer recollects two or three such anecdotes which were told him in boyhood, while within a few months the idea has again come to the surface in an article entitled 'The Strange Fate of Major Rogers, a Buddhistic Mystery,' *Arena*, Dec. 1894, p. 71 ff. Still a third class specify the sort of blasphemy of which the Alban

<sup>1</sup> On the *Chron.* of 354 and the willful alterations there, see Mommsen, p. 649.

<sup>2</sup> See Preller-Jordan, *Röm. Mythol.* 2, 336, n. 2, and 283, n. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Except Zonaras, with whom, as he is an epitomizer, the omission scarcely counts.

king was guilty. He imitated thunder and lightning. Here the likeness to the legend of Salmoneus (Apoll. 1, 7) is, of course, plainly visible.<sup>1</sup>

But Dionysius and Diodorus relate the most interesting part of the story in telling us how the lake rose and overwhelmed Allodius and all his house, and how, to this day, ruins of that house are sometimes to be seen at the bottom. Every one will at once be reminded of those legends of submerged cities and palaces told of in all parts of the world, some of them, like the famous *Vineta*, so well known as to have become the commonplace of folklore. *Sipylus*, *Helice* and *Bura*<sup>2</sup> are examples from classical antiquity. Thirlwall<sup>3</sup> many years ago drew attention to the kinship of the Allodius story with this group of legends, but, so far as I have been able to discover, no one since then has either mentioned his name in this connection or, indeed, made the slightest reference to the same point in this version.

Did Polyhistor or Castor or their like invent this portion of the Allodius story on the analogy of something similar in Greek, for it should be observed that Tantalus, also punished for impiety, was closely connected with Sipylus, a city which was overtaken by a similar fate? If the Allodius story had such an origin it would be current only among those who had read or copied the author. Or, on the other hand, is it an ancient folk-legend of the Alban lake fitted into this portion of so-called Roman history? If we really needed to be convinced that the truth lay in the second alternative, we might appeal to the legend, which is still current in the neighborhood of the Lago Albano. Thirlwall had it from his young guide, who told it as follows: "Where the lake now lies there once stood a great city. Here, when Jesus Christ came into Italy, he begged alms. None took compassion on him but one old woman, who gave him two handfuls of meal. He bade her leave the city; she obeyed: the city instantly sank and the lake rose in its place."

<sup>1</sup> Although C. Robert seems to have been the first to mention it. See Preller-Jordan, *Röm. Mythol.* 2, 338, note.

<sup>2</sup> Ovid alone (*Met.* 15, 293) has the form *Burin*, probably from the analogy of the Latin word *buris*. See Burmann ad loc. Legends of this sort might be cited indefinitely. Reference may be had, among many others, to Grimm, *D. M.* 981 ff.; *D. S.*, Nos. 22 and 131; Gerstäcker's *Germelshausen*; Bassett, *Legends of the Sea*, with references, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Literary Remains*, vol. III, pp. 189-210.

No one, I am sure, will claim a literary origin for this story, however remote. It has lost much of the pomp and circumstance which it probably once had, it has been outwardly affected by the habits of mediaeval Italy, but investigation will show it to be nearer the original than Dionysius is. The Lago Albano lies in the crater of an extinct volcano and has no visible natural outlet. It is surrounded by an unbroken ring of rock, the lowest point of which is 240 feet above the present surface of the lake, itself nearly 2000 feet above the level of the sea. It is six miles long and nearly 500 feet deep. How did such a large hole get here, and how did there come to be a lake in it? The primitive philosopher usually answers such questions as these with a story. And judging from similar stories, we may be sure that in this case it was not, as Diodorus and Dionysius tell it, an incident connected *with* the lake, but that, like the modern legend, it accounted for the very existence of the lake itself and the peculiar configuration of the surrounding country.

"Here was once a table-land," said the old story, "and upon it a city. This city or some king of it was impious: the land sank with it, making a great hole: a lake rose and covered it up. The ruins of that city or palace may still be seen at the bottom when the water is clear." These would appear to have been the main outlines of the legend before it entered the domain of literature, but long after the age of savagery, if indeed this particular story connected with the Alban lake originated in a period of such low culture. The idea of sinking land might easily be suggested by the observed effects of volcanic action. The legend of M. Curtius (Livy 7, 6), the *Campus Ignifer*, the *Ludi Tarentini*, certain details of ritual to the infernal gods, etc., show how late was the cessation of such activity in the old Roman territory.

That the lake was in the habit of rising from time to time is abundantly shown by traces of its action upon the surrounding banks, and that it sometimes overflowed and did much injury to the adjacent slopes and lowlands is proved by the famous *Emisarium*, by which, to this day, the lake is prevented from rising above its present level. The work is doubtless prehistoric, for the story of its origin, the soothsayer, the fall of Veii, etc., told by Livy (5, 19) as occurring A. U. C. 358, B. C. 396, is probably merely a folk-tale to account for the origin of a work about which the Romans really knew nothing. Every one knows the inveterate habit the Roman annalists had of rationalizing the legends



with which they had to deal. It seems to me that the observed fact of an ancient rise and fall of the Alban lake has determined the direction in which this story of Allodius was rationalized by the authorities of Diodorus and Dionysius. They set the palace of the impious king on the *banks* of the lake, which was reasonable enough; they made the water rise and engulf him and his palace, which experience had shown was quite possible: but in saying that the porticoes, etc., of that palace may still be seen in the *bottom* of the lake, they were inconsistent with the story they had started to tell. In this oversight a hint of the original version is perhaps preserved.

In most of these legends of submerged cities it is to be observed that the immediate cause of submersion, if any is alleged, is divine retribution for blasphemy or impiety. The same has already been pointed out with reference to the thunderbolt. This leads us directly to one of the most common phenomena in popular legends, but one which is often overlooked by students of folklore: I mean the justifiable inference that the narrative of Diodorus and Dionysius is a *contaminatio* of two stories originally distinct, but both of them consecrated as recounting the signal vengeance of heaven for impiety, and hence their juxtaposition here. The portion still current in the modern version is a local folk-legend of the Alban lake, going back to an immemorial antiquity, and imperfectly rationalized in the version of Dionysius. The story of the lightning, especially when we recollect that the activity of Polyhistor lies largely in the period when it first appears, has a very suspicious resemblance to the legend of Salmoneus. But while both of these stories are alike conventional instances of divine retribution, the one is never more than local, the other is known the world over, among all men and at all times. This is perhaps the principal reason, besides characteristic perversity, why the Roman writers selected the cheap invention of a third-rate annalist and rejected the not less improbable and perhaps the only fragment of genuine Italic tradition, relieving the deadly barrenness of the list of Alban kings so religiously repeated by all loyal supporters of the imperial house of Caesar.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The legend told by Dionysius has been utilized by Baffico in a short story: 'Fascino Arcano,' *Nuova Antologia*, 47, p. 244. I have not yet discovered it anywhere else in literature.